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CHURCH TRACTS.

Plain Words on Important Subjects.

No. II.

RITUALISM.

What is it? It is good manners—All men are Ritualists. Some are more so. Some are less so. Ritualism enters into the every day life and habits of all nations, civilized or savage, and of all religions, true or false.

Exactly what constitutes good manners, each nation, society or class will answer for itself. The good manners of one society will be thought rude by another and *vice versa*.

Ritualism is a necessary ingredient in the fusion and adhesion of the several members of any band or society.

Parents and teachers have now the good sense to use the element of ritual largely in the education of their children—that is to say : lessons are arrayed in a dress which is pleasant to the eye to look upon.

Ritual plays an important part in the affairs of civil government.

Only cynics sneer at the antique dresses of heralds and “beef-eaters” and the pageantry of court and official ceremonial ; wise men recognize the value of these uses. These dresses connect the England of to-day with the England of a hoary past, and teach that though the individual monarch dies the monarchy survives.

The stability of English institutions is not a little due to the ritualism in which they have been wrapped.

Wise men do not sneer at “military millinery” nor think that the ritualism of the army and navy is contemptible.

So truly wise men will not sneer at what the thoughtless and unkind have called “ecclesiastical millinery,” the ritualism of the house and army of God.

The ritualism of the priest of the church of the living God is the sentiment and poetry of his calling.

Such ritualism as the use of vestments, lights, incense, etc., etc., is a common heritage of all Christendom, links yet left in the chain of unity which once bound together the national churches of Christ.

There are degrees of ritualism. There may be too much ceremonial as well as too little. This proves error in judgment, not vital error to be prosecuted. The picture may be obscured in the gorgeousness of its frame—equally may the beauty of worship be marred by the meanness of its surroundings.

Proportion of ritual is largely a matter of personal taste—some people love strong colors and deep contrasts ; others are pleased and edified by neutral tints and sober coloring.

Men love ritualism and men will have ritualism, and when it is shut out of the house and worship of God, it buds and blooms and flourishes in human societies, where men do congregate, such as Freemasons, Temperance, Orange, Oddfellows, Sons of England, etc., etc.

What has Holy Scriptures to say on the subject of ritualism? Was there ever a more ritualistic worship than that which was prescribed by God Himself for the guidance and observance of His chosen church of old?

God Himself, elaborates the ritual to accompany His public service—the vestments of His ministers and their material, shape and color—the furniture of the House of God, its gold and silver, its woods and hangings—its precious gems.

How is all this consistent with the declaration so often made in these later years of the Christian era by men who profess to know the mind of God, that God loves “a simple worship.”

God has never declared in the Bible that he loves what men call a “simple worship,” but God has declared in the Bible, and that most emphatically, that he loves and desires a worship surrounded by those externals of beauty and splendor to which men now presume to give (in their mouths a nick-name) the name ritualism.

Men say—we can worship God in a barn as well as in a ritualistic church.

In answer—First : Why then don't they worship God in a barn and throw out their cushions and chairs and those other accessories which minister to their own comfort, but which are not of the nature and property of a barn.

Secondly : If you have no church by all means worship in your barn. But if you have means to erect a church and to adorn it with ritualistic splendor, then God (if he be the same God who required the costliness of the treasures of his people delivered from Egyptian bondage for His Tabernacle) will require you to do so.

God has in all His works and words declared His love of the beautiful, whether that beauty be internal or external to the eye of man.

He is the "King in His beauty," the ritual arrangements of His worship should be designed "for glory and for beauty."

The slime of the serpent has passed and left its stain—nevertheless the world, marred by the penalty of sin, bears witness to God's love of that which delights the eye and charms the ear of man.

Everything in the world is gorgeous—the plumage of the bird—the gauzy wing of the insect. The tiniest atom of organized matter is formed after some pattern of exquisite beauty and glorious coloring.

God's love of the beautiful is written in His revelation on the open page of nature. The same God has declared His will that the beautiful shall be carried into the place where men assemble to worship Him on earth. We shall be told by some that Christ abolished all that God appointed as the ritualism of His worship by His church. The assertion thus made that our Lord prescribed a "simple worship" for His church is based upon a mere assumption—modern, sectarian and narrow. Christ came to fulfil, not to destroy the law, *i.e.*, the Mosaic law as written in Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy.

He was a constant attendant on the ritualistic worship at the Temple in Jerusalem, and He has left us no word of disapproval of the ritualism thereof. His denunciations were levelled against irreverence in the Temple—selling and buying within its precincts and carrying common vessels through its courts ; against the pharisaism of making long prayers, to be seen of men, of seeking the chief seats in the synagogue and greetings in the marketplaces.

A favorite text of the opponent of ritualism is "God is a spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth."

To argue that "spirit and truth" are antagonized by ritualism is to say that there was no "spirit and truth" in the revelation of God to Moses.

There is room for as much "spirit and truth" and very much less opportunity for self-seeking and self-worship in a ritualistic public worship, than is to be found in what men now call by the unscriptural and newly invented term, "a simple worship."

Behold the description of ritualistic worship as described in the Book of Revelation.

Perchance a reader may say : Oh ! but the Book of Revelation is only allegorical or mystical or typical. Suppose we grant this, not absolutely, but for argument's sake. What then ? Is the Book an allegory, which represents something its total opposite—or a mystery shrouded in a shadow, a non-existent reality—*i.e.*, a sham or a type whose anti-type is its obverse ?

Is the Revelation which "Jesus Christ sent and signified by an angel to his servant John," a message to tell of something that does not exist ?

To argue thus is to trifle with the word of God. All Holy scriptures are given by inspiration and are profitable. All scripture is for our learning, and all the Holy scriptures which deal with the subject of the public worship of the most Most High God exhibit to us ritualism as the loved and accepted of God.

Some men will say : There is no description of ritualism in worship in the gospels. Why should there be ? God had already revealed in those scriptures of which Christ says : "They are they which testify of me," and which we believe to "contain all things necessary to be believed for salvation," His will with regard to the external character of His public worship.

Those who cry, the Bible and the Bible only is our religion should be consistent and accept the *whole* Bible, each portion severally presenting the will and mind of God on those subjects of which it particularly treats.

Lastly : Ritualism in the Church of England is rapidly regaining to the church those classes which the pew system and "simple worship" expelled therefrom.

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